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SPEECH AND ACTION.

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DELIVERED BEFORE

THE HERMAEAN SOCIETY

OF

HARVARD UNIVERSITY,

ON

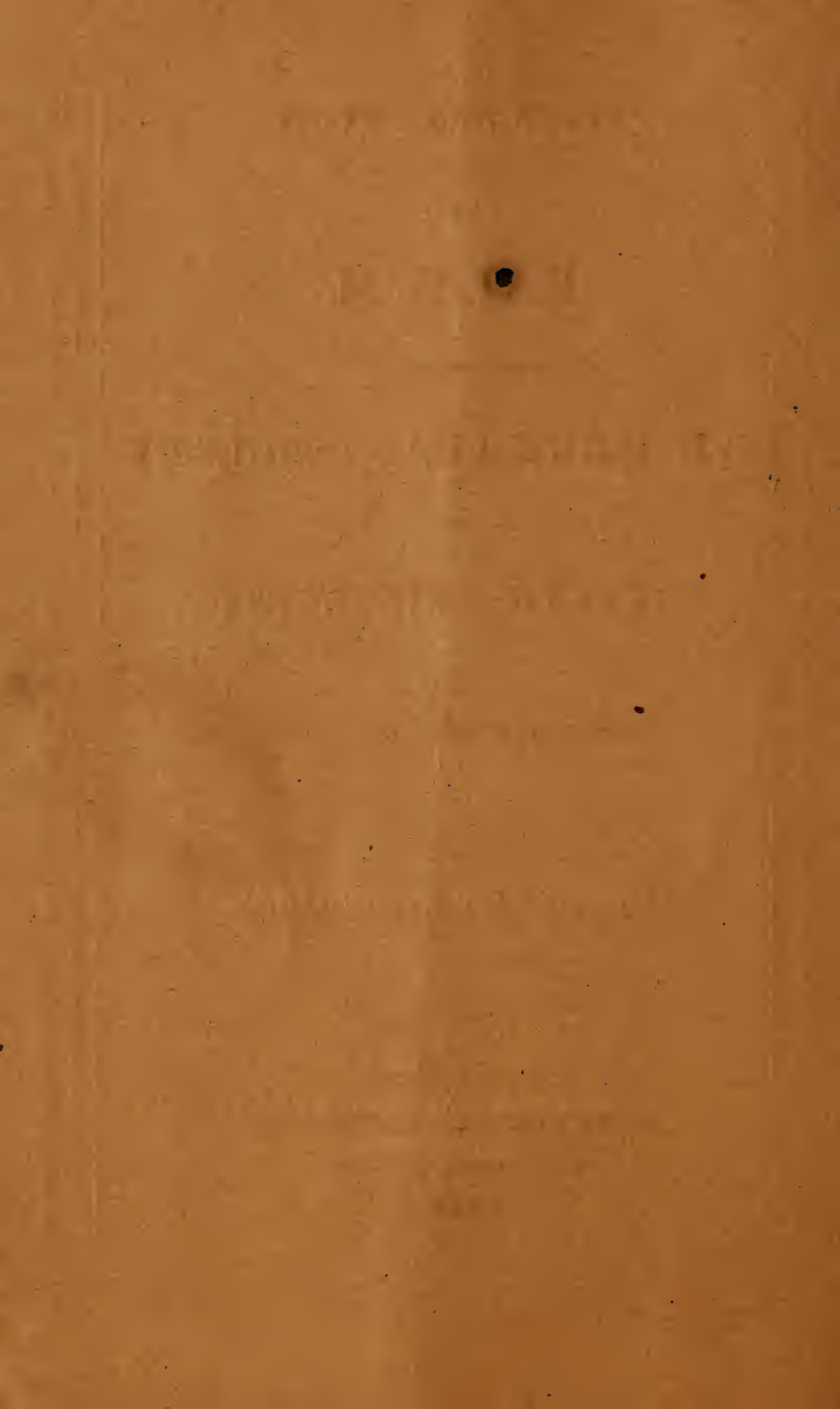
WEDNESDAY EVENING, JULY 11, 1849.

BY JOSHUA D. ROBINSON.

CAMBRIDGE:
METCALF AND COMPANY,

PRINTERS TO THE UNIVERSITY.

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CAMBRIDGE, August 10, 1849.

DEAR SIR, —

The undersigned, members of Harvard College, request, in the name of their fellow-students, a copy of the Poem delivered by you before the HERMAEAN SOCIETY, Wednesday, July 11, 1849, for printing.

J. M. GORHAM,	W. C. WHEELWRIGHT,
W. F. ALLEN,	C. C. MITCHELL,
A. T. HABERSHAM,	THEODORE TEBBETS,
E. H. HALL,	H. W. HAYNES,
S. A. GREEN,	ROBERT BICKFORD,
J. N. MEAD,	J. H. SPRAGUE.
W. P. FIELD,	

MR. J. D. ROBINSON.

CAMBRIDGE, August 10, 1849.

GENTLEMEN, —

I can do no less than comply with the request embraced in your favor of this date. I accordingly transmit herewith the manuscript you desire.

Respectfully yours,

J. D. ROBINSON.

MR. J. M. GORHAM, }
and others. }

SPEECH AND ACTION.

I.

AWAKE, my muse, and elevate your paw
To sweep the lyre for Eloquence and War.

Hermes, thou God of Speech, be thou the source
Of kindly aid, while I of Speech discourse.

The nursing babe that just begins to crawl,
Whose jingling rattle mingles with its squall ;
The romping school-boy, by whose lusty shout
You judge that school, and bedlam, too, is out ;
The wandering poet, of whose travailing brain
Is born what men most fitly call a strain ;

The learned man of law, whose hair, on end,
Sticks up towards heaven as lightning-rods extend, —
Himself revolving like some murderous gun,
Whose noise will soon twelve harmless victims stun ;
(His eye-balls from their sockets seem to dart,
Like bullets blue, into the jury's heart.
Whether with barrels four or six he 's stocked,
His readiness to fire proves he 's "cocked." —
And though he 's pointed, still the jury's snore
Shows how resignedly they bear the "bore."
The judge's charge is all that they require
To make them ready, in their turn, to fire,
Determined in themselves that "they 'll be blowed,"
If they don't "come" on him an equal load ;
While the poor prisoner, catching every tone,
Hears the discharge, in anguish for his own!) —
All these are Orators, nor these alone :
The solemn bull-frog's momentary groan ;
The cricket's chirp ; the owl's nocturnal whoot ;
The buzzings of all bugs that buzz to boot ;

The hum of business in the crowded street ;
Every expression on each face you meet ;
Eyes lighted up with joy, or raining tears
On cheeks all furrowed with their share of years ;
And all the eloquent flashes ever flung
From young maid's eye, or e'en an old one's tongue ;
Those dulcet strains that rouse you from your snooze,
The midnight wailings of the feline muse ;
Your neighbour's snore, that wakes you up to wonder
Why no bright flash precedes such deafening thunder,
While you obey the Almanac in vain,
When at the window you " look out for rain,"
Vexed with the loss of rest, you gain your bed,
But not repose, — the rest of sleep is fled ; —
The squall, the scream, the buzz, the whiz, the
 groan,
Nay, of all forms of utterance that are known,
Each gives expression to some vast idea,
Each speaking thing 's a preacher in its sphere ;
No matter if that sphere be great or small,
A house-dog's kennel or a Congress hall.

Look on each trembling leaf, each humble flower,
The voiceless teachers of Almighty Power ;
See the same lesson, with your heavenward eye,
Written in lines of light across the sky ;
Hear it in zephyr's breath, or in the blast
Of swift tornadoes, as they thunder past ;
Go where the restless waves of ocean roar
'Neath caverned rock, or on the sandy shore,
Or in deep woods, whose columns seem to rise,
Like pillars propping over-arching skies,
Where swelling tides of music, deep and strong,
Roll out in wavelets of mellifluous song ;
Where'er man's eye hath seen, or foot hath trod,
Nature, in eloquent speech, adores her God !

But if we seek for eloquence in man,
No distant age or place of earth I scan,
But turn my eyes within this room, to view
Before my vision ranged a noble few,
And think how oft these dear old walls have rung
With accents sweet of some Hermaean tongue,

That sported with each word as with a toy ;
(Hermes himself was but a playful boy.)
Perhaps, indeed, we 've served to prove the truth
Of that poetic figure, " green is youth " ;
Yet not discouraged we, while equal chance
Is given us with others to advance.
Born of the leap-year, we 'll its spirit keep ;
For while life's *spring*-time lasts, we mean to leap.
We don't expect to " go it " at a rate
Beyond the power of man to calculate ;
But yet to keep progressing up the hill,
Still in no other sense than " onward still."
They used to go about from place to place
In stages, travelling at a horse's pace ;
But when the light of science tinged, with beam
Of golden hue, the rising clouds of steam,
Mail-coaches were effeminate indeed, —
Men puffed the locomotive for its speed ;
And now, when for despatch the steam-power fails,
They send despatches on aerial rails.

They stand in one end of the land, and then
Write in the other with a magic pen!
An athlete trains himself in every part,
With all the skill of pugilistic art ;
Learns with a pair of fists to parry blows,
(Although 't is only meant to "blow his nose,")
To watch his chance the other's nose to peel,
And look out sharply for his "turn to deal."
But when, for skill the timely thrust to dart,
He thinks himself the highest in his art ;
While thousands gaze upon him and admire,
E'en Sullivan "knocks under" to a *higher*.

What if it be not ours with mighty will
To calm the angry waves with "Peace, be still," —
Nor ours with Ciceronian tongue to sway
A Senate others dare not disobey, —
Nor yet, with Adams's and Henry's might,
To rouse an infant nation to the fight ?
These instances of lofty eloquence
Should be examples, not discouragements.

Enough for us to know, if we 've begun,
 Horatian wisdom tells us half is done ;
 And if, at first, we take an humble part,
 Eternal progress is the law of art ;
 And though perfection we may never claim,
 Progress is ours, — perfection but our aim.

II.

Fair Maia's Son, again my song inspire ;
 ('T was you, you cunning thief, that made the lyre ;)
 Sweep, with the sword which thou from Mars didst
 steal,
 Tones from its strings that even Mars may feel.
 Thou warrior, that didst slay the hundred-eyed,
 Descend, and o'er my humble strain preside,
 While I relate what mighty deeds were done, —
 On Harvard's ground the battle fought and won !

Policemen armed, each with two poles of wood,
 (One in the hand, one on the shoulders stood,)

Hard by the portals of old Harvard Hall,
Took up a post that was not wood at all ;
'T is said they also had another *would*,
With one condition, namely, if they could.
“ Fair women and brave men,” a noble throng,
Advanced with steady march and column strong.
No martial spirit did their souls pervade,
But they were all in lines of peace arrayed.
No burnished weapon glittered in the hand, —
They came together as a festive band.
But, lo ! — above, a club is seen to rise,
Nor is the fall unheeded by their eyes ;
For downward, with impetuous force, it sped
On one of Harvard's sons' unconscious head.
Then through the ranks the cry of “ Harvard ” rang !
Then to the van each son of Harvard sprang !
And while stout hearts against stout clubs appear,
Old Massachusetts backs them in the rear.
Their fathers' shades, the hallowed grounds above,
With arms outstretched as in paternal love,

Bent o'er each son, and, with approving nod,
Bade him defend the ground his fathers trod.
The warm blood tingled in each throbbing vein,
Mad to rush forth and wash away the stain.
In wooden billets compliments were sent,
On wooden heads collegian strength was spent ;
While every stout policeman, with his pole,
To crown the whole, did try some crowns to hole.
They seem to think that "all the world 's a stage,"
Themselves the drivers for the present age ;
Yet find they, ere is finished the affray,
That Harvard's sons can *stick as fast* as they ;
For there were other clubs beside their own, —
The club in seventeen hundred seventy grown,
That lived through all the days of seventy-six,
And now prepared to show its foes the Styx.
And yet another one, of modern date,
Hermaeans true, of eighteen forty-eight ;
They furnish the police with sundry thumps,
From which they judge that college clubs are
"trumps."

The great authorities are in "a fix,"
They miss their aim, and then they miss their sticks,
And being "treated to some punches" sweet,
With modesty instinctive they retreat.

The diffidence that ended that affray
Forbids me also to prolong my lay;
But still I love to linger on the strain,
Although my pleasure prove to be your pain;
And if the evening's harmony is marred
By these few gratings of your humble bard,
Reflect that every pleasure hath its pain,
And joys ne'er come in one unbroken train;
Think of the flinty piece of shell, I beg,
Scratching your gums while you devour your egg.
To chew a raisin's very fine indeed,
Until you come to pulverize the seed.
Then call Philosophy to be your aid,
And calmly bear the woes yourselves have made,
And think how suicidal 't was in you,
To give to me this dangerous task to do.

But if the few stray thoughts I've caught and penned
Only a transitory pleasure lend,
(Though each as worthless as a straw appears,
Yet straws will answer well for tickling ears,)
Then I have pleased myself as well as you,
In doing that which gives each one his due ;
And since I judge how well my nonsense goes,
By looking at the hole beneath each nose,
Surely, there is but one return to ask
In recompense for my laborious task, —
A universal, face-distorting grin,
With one ear at each end to hold it in!
If such applause it be my lot to claim,
I spurn the Olympic victor's deathless fame ;
But yet, like those they gained with deadly arms,
My own reward lies also in your palms.

1 Oct. 1851.



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